

Mrs. Pat Campbell's Story

A Review. By RICHARD BURTON.

MY LIFE AND SOME LETTERS. By Mrs. Patrick Campbell. Dodd, Mead & Co.

THE ancient jest connecting the words "dotage" and "anecdote" is given the lie this season by the generous outpouring of memoirs, reminiscences, essays, biographies and autobiographies from the vigorous veterans of so many crafts and kinds. Among them are Mrs. Asquith, Page, Lang, Morgenthau, to stand for politics and society, Howe, Miss Ticknor, Eagan, Machen, Matthews, Howells, Huxley, Dreicer, Kemp and Simmons, representing art or letters, Rainsford, who speaks for religion, and Drew, Thomas and Mrs. Patrick Campbell, ornaments of the stage in its varying aspects. When such folk choose to talk of their deeds and days who of us is not glad to bask in the mellow sunshine of their remembrance? Really it is a most unusual display and no part of one's winter reading is likely to be pleasanter than the perusal of these backward-looking chronicles.

For enjoyment, stimulation, charm, the volume by "Mrs. Pat," as her friends are by way of calling her, will surely rank high. "My Life and Some Letters," she has entitled it, a piquing designation, as if letters were not part of life, and for most of us a big and bothersome part. Perhaps Mrs. Campbell means modestly to imply that in her case they furnish the chief attraction of her book, and there is something to say for the idea since she is indeed fortunate in being able to print (with their permission, be it added) the inimitable epistles of Messrs. Shaw and Barrie, each in his own fashion so fascinating—and what a different fashion it is! G. B. S.'s sublimated love making, a kind of innocent intellectual philandering with a sound friendship beneath it, fairly makes one gasp. You feel that whether or no he is making love he is certainly making literature—and are pleased to be present. And these two eminencies are but leaders in a correspondence that includes many present day personages.

Regarding this large volume as a piece of constructive workmanship, it is naively imperfect. At times it seems hardly more than slung together; now chronologic, then, at the stimulating suggestion of some personality or place, going back years and with small attempt to conceal the sutures, or to apologize for gaps. But the judicious reader won't mind this in the least. The throbbing life, the picturesque comment by a pen that has a penchant for the effective word—the rich personal quality—are all there, and the subject matter is of a sort to furnish forth delightful pages.

Few franker books have appeared. Yet there are reserves, nor is good taste absent: as where at the volume's end the author drops the veil over the results of her second marriage, that to George Cornwallis-West. In everything her own individuality dominates, an elusive but most appreciable thing. In a note to her from John Macall, Oxford professor of poetry, he speaks of "the queer beautiful radiance that goes about with you." That's just it, the reader feels. Much of this gets into the book, and one responds to it. When Mrs. Campbell is in the mood, she doesn't hesitate to interrupt her story with pages of maxims and epigrams, for all the world like an Amiel or a Pascal; and very pungent and happy they often are, as thus, one of many: "People we love must be loved as they are. It is a want both of wisdom and courage on our part—a sort of drug—this willful blindness, to blame them, because they fail our vision of them." Or again this: "When the animal nature in man is completely dominant, we may be sure that the mind is diseased." An American doctor told me nobody would be evil if their brain molecules were normal." Once more: "The two best things to know I learned last: the meaning of the Lord's Prayer, and the word Forgive."

The revealed insouciance, the temperamental nature for gaiety or gloom in quick transition, may be perhaps related to the half Italian origin of the author. Her mother, of whom a beautiful pen portrait is made, was of that race. The

daughter's relation to her, to her Uncle Henry, her devotion, not to say adoration of her actor-soldier son, "Boo," and her daughter Stella, also a player in her mother's company until her marriage in Africa; the whole tragedy of her wedded life with Patrick Campbell, killed in the Boer War, as was her son in the war from which we are now staggeringly trying to recover—all of this is set down vividly, to give one a sense that in her private experiences, in what happens behind life's curtain, this debonair and seemingly blase woman has in truth, been acquainted with grief. Her public theater life in America and England through a distinguished record of over a generation is of course blazoned in a way to be of intense interest to all who love the playhouse and its triumphs. It is almost frankly set down, her likes and dislikes equally. Granville Barker rubbed her the wrong way evidently; contrariwise, she got on famously with Pinero. What might be called her professional generosity is marked; praise for fellow players is the major note. And she prints adverse criticisms of her work freely, side by side with the eulogy. One of the really valuable things brought out in her recording is the continual desire of an actress early identified, for better or worse, with sophisticated parts like Mrs. Tanqueray, to do other, contrasted

work. It is the old story of becoming associated in the public mind with one type. Her own managerial career in its selection of plays and parts testifies to this artistic aspiration. "Soiled Doves" were not of her own predilection.

The present scribe will always treasure as one of his rarest theater experiences a certain matinee in London when Mrs. Campbell played *Melisande* opposite to Madame Bernhardt in her own French company, in Maeterlinck's beautiful fatalistic drama "Pelleas and Melisande." It was then and there borne in on him that here was in truth a great artist who could turn from the Tanquerays and Bella Donnas and George Sands to give a wonderful impersonation of the exquisite child wife.

Somebody—Longfellow, if memory serves—has said that autobiography is what biography ought to be. When the publishers asked Mrs. Campbell for a hundred thousand words, she tells us, she laughed, and said she couldn't write a letter anybody could read—"and I knew only about thirty words—and some of those were swear words!" She was wrong; there is genuine literary atmosphere to this chronicle, and in that it brings us illuminatingly into a close and cordial relation with a person of remarkable accomplishment, and of unusually winsome personality. The life is what a biography ought to be. And there are depths beneath the brilliant, shimmering surfaces.

Life as a Great Adventure

A Review by FREDERIC TABER COOPER.

THE ADVENTURE OF LIVING. A SUBJECTIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY. By John St. Lee Strachey. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

IN treating life as a great adventure Mr. Strachey has found the formula for writing that well nigh rare type of enduring books, an autobiography with an abiding charm. At the outset he quotes the admirable advice given by Sir Thomas Browne to his son who was about to write an account of his travels in Hungary. He urged him strongly to avoid a multitude of facts and statistics, but on no account to omit a description of the "Roman alabaster tomb in the barber's shop at Pesth." It is because of his almost uncanny recognition of what constitutes the "alabaster tomb element" in the busy life of a London journalist that the veteran editor of the *Spectator* has produced a volume as welcome for the rich diversity of its range in life and in letters as for the rare clarity of its delightful prose.

As the pivot of his life has been the *Spectator*, Mr. Strachey makes the *Spectator* the pivot of his book by devoting his first chapter to it. While still an undergraduate at Oxford he had two sonnets, his earliest contributions to the press, accepted by it. His first regular connection with it, however, grew out of a review of a new edition of "Gulliver's Travels," which to his great surprise and delight evoked enthusiastic and unstinted praise from the editors. Looking back at what he calls "the lucky accident which brought the right book, the right reviewer and the properly tuned editors together," Mr. Strachey feels bound to add that the editors were right and that he had produced good copy. But he gives full credit to the helpful influence of their kindly praise. "Generous encouragement is the necessary mental nourishment of youth, and those who withhold it are not only foolish but cruel. They are keeping food from the hungry." More decisive still was the success of his first appearance as a political leader writer. Against the protest of one of the editors he wrote a leader under the "appallingly dull" title of "The Privy Council and the Colonies," in which he sought to show what a potent bond of empire was to be found in the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. His arguments happened to be just what were needed by Lord Granville, then Colonial Secretary, who used them as the basis for an address to a deputation of Agents-General of the Colonies. From that day Mr. Strachey was permanently on the editorial staff, for "it wasn't every day that the editors of the *Spectator* could draw Cabinet Ministers to advertise their paper."

"Above all I was fortunate in my father

and mother," is the opening sentence to a delightful chapter on the author's home impressions. His father was an ideal talker to children and young people, because he had "an innate kindness and sympathy with the young, and was in a perpetual mood to answer questions." His mother was a woman of quick intelligence and of specially attractive personality; "to her we children owed a great deal in the matter of manners. . . . giving ourselves airs, or any other form of juvenile vulgarity were well nigh unforgivable sins." But what one feels to have been an even more potent formative influence was a remarkable old family nurse, Mrs. Leaker. Of the many anecdotes he relates of her perhaps the most striking is that of her adventure in stumbling quite by accident upon the Venus of Milo in the Louvre. "I never thought to see anything so beautiful," she reported, "and the broken arm did not matter at all, for she stood there like a goddess." But although all beautiful things appealed to Mrs. Leaker, literature was the element in which she lived:

"She cropped all the flowers in the fields of literature, prose and verse. . . . She was quite prepared to read us to sleep with the witches in 'Macbeth' or the death scene in 'Othello.' . . . As she sat bent forward, declaiming the most soul shaking things in Shakespeare between 9 and 10 at night, we lay in our beds with our chins on the counterpanes, silent, scared but intensely happy. We loved every word and slept quite well when the play was finished."

One would like to linger over the chapter on "Boyhood: Poetry and Meter," in which Mr. Strachey imparts his early passion for the metrical art and the "delirium of delight" with which he absorbed Byron and Shelley, and how he "fell tooth and nail upon Swinburne, Morris and Rossetti," and thought, or pretended to think, that Marlowe, Beaumont and Ben Jonson were the equals of Shakespeare. Equally significant are the chapters on Oxford, which cover the annals of happy days, even though the author "miserably squirmed his way through Mods," and brought away a lifelong animosity toward Greek aorists and "the double damned Digamma." Because of his inborn inability to learn languages Mr. Strachey has been a consistent opponent to compulsory Greek and Latin. As for such knowledge bringing the ordinary man into touch with the Greek spirit, he insists that "it does nothing of the kind."

There is much in the later part of this autobiography that throws interesting light upon world politics, and especially

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